

FOUR OPEN LETTERS

FROM THE

University Commission on
Race Questions

TO THE

College Men of the South



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LYNCHING

This letter is not written to convince you that lynching is a crime, for you know it already. Its object is to urge you to show others whenever opportunity presents itself that lynching does more than rob its victims of their constitutional rights and of their lives. It simultaneously lynches law and justice and civilization, and outrages all the finer human sentiments and feelings.

The wrong that it does to the wretched victims is almost as nothing compared to the injury it does to the lynchers themselves, to the community, and to society at large.

Lynching is a contagious social disease, and as such is of deep concern to every American citizen and to every lover of civilization. It is especially of concern to you, and you can do much to abolish it. Vice and crime know that their best, though unconscious and unwilling allies, are luke-warmness and timidity on the part of educated, "good" citizens. Wrong is weaker than right, and must yield whenever right is persistent and determined.

It is, of course, no argument in favor of lynching, nor can we derive any legitimate satisfaction from the fact that it is not confined to any one section of our country and that the victims are not always black. One of the bad features of lynching is that it quickly becomes a habit, and, like all bad habits, deepens and widens rapidly. Formerly lynchings were mainly incited by rape and murder, but the habit has spread until now such outrages are committed for much less serious crimes.

The records of lynching for 1914, compiled by three different agencies, give the total number for the year at 52, 54, and 74, the authority for these figures being Tuskegee Institute, the *Chicago Tribune*, and the *Crisis*, respectively.

The conflicting reports can not be harmonized, but, to avoid any possibility of exaggeration, we may employ the most conservative of these for analysis.

It reveals these facts: Number lynched—colored: male 46, female 3; white: male 3, female 0. Total 52.

Crimes charged against victims: Murder 13, robbery and murder 6, robbery and attempted murder 1, suspected of murder 1, rape 6, attempted rape 1, killing an officer 5, wounding officer 1, murderous assault 3, alleged murderous assault 1, biting off a man's chin 1, accused of wounding a person 1, killing person in quarrel 4, beating child to death 1, trying to force way into woman's room 1, stealing shoes 1, stealing mules 1, setting fire to barn 2, assisting a man to escape who had wounded another 1, being found under a house 1.

The three women were lynched for the following reasons: One, 17 years old, for killing a man who, it was reported, had raped her; the second was accused of beating a child to death; the third was accused of helping her husband set fire to a barn. In the last case, both husband and wife were lynched in the presence of their 4-year-old child.

It should be especially noted that of the fifty-two persons lynched, only seven—two white and five colored—or 13 per cent, were charged with the crime against womanhood. This shows clearly how far and how quickly the habit has spread beyond the bounds set by those who first resorted to lynching as a remedy.

According to states, the lynchings were distributed as follows: Alabama 2, Arkansas 1, Florida 4, Georgia 2, Louisiana 12, Mississippi 12, Missouri 1, New Mexico 1, North Dakota 1, North Carolina 1, Oklahoma 3, Oregon 1, South Carolina 4, Tennessee 1, Texas 6.

The same agency which reported fifty-two lynchings for 1914 makes the following report for 1915: Number lynched—colored: male 51, female 3; white: male 14, female 0. Total 68. This is an increase of 16, or 30 per cent, over the total number for 1914.

According to states, the lynchings for 1915 were distributed as follows: Alabama 9, Arkansas 5, Florida 5, Georgia 18, Illinois 1, Kentucky 5, Louisiana 2, Mississippi 9, Missouri 2, Ohio 1, Oklahoma 3, South Carolina 1, Tennessee 2, Texas 5.

It is worthy of note that in at least four cases it later was discovered that the victims of the mob were innocent of the crime of which they were accused.

These are the terrible facts. Is there no remedy? Have we not sufficient legal intelligence and machinery to take care of every case of crime committed? Must we fall back on the methods of the jungle? Civilization rests on obedience to law, which means the substitution of reason and deliberation for impulse, instinct, and passion. It is easy and tempting to obey the latter, but to be governed by the former requires self-control, which comes from the interposition of thought between impulse and action. Herein lies the college man's opportunity to serve his fellows; to interpose deliberation between their impulses and action, and in that way to control both.

Society has a right to expect college men to help in moulding opinion and shaping conduct in matters of this sort. It is their privilege and duty to coöperate with others in leading crusades against crime and mob rule and for law and civilization. The college man belongs in the front rank of those fighting for moral and social progress. For this reason the University Commission makes its first appeal to you and urges you strongly to coöperate with the press, the pulpit, the bar, officers of the law, and all other agencies striving to eliminate this great evil, by speaking out boldly when speech is needed and letting your influence be felt against it in decided, unmistakable measure and manner.

(Signed) J. J. DOSTER, Professor of Education and Dean of the School of Education, University of Alabama.

D. Y. THOMAS, Professor of Political Science, University of Arkansas.

JAMES M. FARR, Professor of English, University of Florida.

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JAMES D. HOSKINS, Dean of the University of Tennessee.

W. S. SUTTON, Professor of Education and Dean of the School of Education, University of Texas.

W. M. HUNLEY, Professor of Economics, Virginia Military Institute.

January 5, 1916.

II

EDUCATION

In its first open letter to college men of the South, issued at the beginning of the present year, the University Commission urged them to unite their efforts with those of the press, the pulpit, the bar, the officers of the law, and all other agencies laboring for the elimination of the monster evil of mob violence. These agencies have labored diligently and with substantial results, as is indicated by the decrease of the average annual number of lynchings from 171 for the decade 1886-1895 to 70 for the decade 1906-1915. Nevertheless, the Commission wishes to reiterate its appeal with renewed emphasis, knowing that the eradication of so virulent a social disease as the lynching mania can be effected only by the prolonged and vigorous efforts of sane and patriotic citizens.

In this letter the Commission wishes to direct the attention of the college men to the educational aspect of the race question, inasmuch as the solution of all human problems ultimately rests upon rightly directed education. In its last analysis, education simply means bringing forth all the native capacities of the individual for the benefit both of himself and of society. It is axiomatic that a developed plant, animal, or man is far more valuable to society than the undeveloped. It is likewise obvious that ignorance is the most fruitful source of human ills. Furthermore, it is as true in a social as in a physical sense that a chain is no stronger than its weakest link. The good results thus far obtained, as shown by the Negro's progress within recent years, prompt the Commission to urge the extension of his educational opportunities.

The inadequate provision for the education of the Negro is more than an injustice to him; it is an injury to the white man. The South can not realize its destiny if one-third of its population is undeveloped and inefficient. For our common welfare we must strive to cure disease wherever we find it, strengthen whatever is weak, and develop all that is undeveloped. The initial steps for increasing the efficiency and usefulness of the Negro race must necessarily be taken in the school room. There can be no denying that more and better schools, with better trained and better paid teachers, more adequate supervision and longer terms, are needed for the blacks, as well as the whites. The Negro schools are, of course, parts of the school systems of their respective states, and as such share in the progress and prosperity of their state systems. Our appeal is for a larger share for the Negro, on the ground of the common welfare and common justice. He is the weakest link in our civilization, and our welfare is indissolubly bound up with his.

Many means are open to the college men of the South for arousing greater public interest in this matter and for promoting a more vigorous public effort to this end. A right attitude in this, as in all other important public questions, is a condition precedent to success. For this reason the Commission addresses to Southern college men this special appeal.

(Signed) J. J. DOSTER, Professor of Education and Dean of the School of Education, University of Alabama.

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JAMES D. HOSKINS, Dean of the University of Tennessee.

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W. M. HUNLEY, Professor of Economics, Virginia Military Institute.

September 1, 1916.

III

MIGRATION

On two previous occasions the University Commission on Southern Race Questions addressed open letters to the college men of the South, setting forth briefly the results of their studies and conferences on topics of importance to both races. The first of these dealt with the lynching evil, and, after pointing out the inherent injustice of it and its menace to the established institutions of society, emphasized the fact that human actions are like boomerangs, affecting those who act as much as, if not more than, those who are acted upon. It is becoming more and more recognized that the white race in many subtle ways has suffered more from lynching and its consequences than has the black.

The second letter dealt with the education of the Negro, and stressed the need of larger support, better teachers, longer terms, and more adequate facilities, again on the ground of inherent justice of the proposal, and the fact that in doing for others we do even more for ourselves.

In the present letter the Commission wishes to address the college men on what it considers the most immediate pressing problem of the South, and one of the most important for the nation, namely, Negro Migration. The present migration of the Negro is not an anomalous phenomenon in human affairs. The economic and social laws that affect the lives and actions of white men produce practically the same effects upon the Negro. It should not be surprising, therefore, to find him obeying so promptly and in such large numbers the economic law of demand and supply. There was no extensive migration until the industrial centers, facing a dangerous shortage of labor, owing to the complete shutting off of the European sources of supply, turned to the South, where large sources were available. And so they sent their agents, with very alluring promises, and liberally used the Negro press, handbills, letters, lecturers, and other means designed quickly to uproot the Negro and draw him to the railroads, factories, and mines, where his labor is sorely needed. The dollar has lured the Negro to the East and North, as it has lured the white man even to the most inaccessible and forbidding regions of the earth. But the human being is moved and held not by money alone. Birthplace, home ties, family, friends, associations and attachments of numerous kinds, fair treatment, opportunity to labor and enjoy the legitimate fruits of labor, assurance of even-handed justice in the courts, good educational facilities, sanitary living conditions, tolerance, and sympathy—these things, and others like them, make an even stronger appeal to the human mind and heart than does money.

The South can not compete on a financial basis with other sections of the country for the labor of the Negro, but the South can easily keep her Negroes against all allurements if she will give them a larger measure of those things that human beings hold dearer than material goods. Generosity begets gratitude, and gratitude grips and holds man more powerfully than hooks of steel. It is axiomatic that fair dealing, sympathy, patience, tolerance, and other human virtues benefit those who

exercise them even more than the beneficiaries of them. It pays to be just and kind, both spiritually and materially. Surely the South has nothing to lose and much to gain by adopting an attitude like that indicated above.

(Signed) J. J. DOSTER, Professor of Education and Dean of the School of Education, University of Alabama.

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W. M. HUNLEY, Professor of Economics, Virginia Military Institute.

August 31, 1917.

IV A NEW RECONSTRUCTION

The world-wide reconstruction that is following in the wake of the war will necessarily affect the South in a peculiar way. Nearly 300,000 Negroes have been called into the military service of the country; many thousands more have been drawn from peaceful pursuits into industries born of the war; and several hundred thousand have shifted from the South to the industrial districts of the North. The demobilization of the army and the transition of industry from a war to a peace basis are creating many problems which can be solved only by the efforts of both races. The Negro, in adapting himself to the new conditions, should have the wise sympathy and generous coöperation of his white neighbors. It is to the interest of these, as well as of the Negro himself, that readjustment should proceed with the least possible difficulty and delay.

We believe that this readjustment may be effectively aided by a more general appreciation of the Negro's value as a member of the community. Lack of sympathy and understanding between two groups of people frequently causes one group to regard the shortcomings of a few individuals of the other as characteristic of all that group. This is a natural tendency, but it is neither rational nor just, and it has proved, we believe, one of the great obstacles to the development of more satisfactory racial relations in this country.

The Negroes' contribution to the welfare of the nation has never been more clearly indicated than by his services during the Great War. When the call to arms was sounded his country expected him to do his duty, and he did not fail. Large numbers of black men on the fields of France made the supreme sacrifice for the cause of world democracy. In other war services the Negroes did their full share. Many thousands were employed in the building of ships, the manufacture of munitions, the construction of cantonments, and in the production of the coal, iron, cotton, and food stuffs without which victory would have been impossible. The Negroes' purchases of Liberty Bonds and War Savings Stamps, and their contributions to the Red Cross, the United War Work Fund, and other similar agencies are in themselves a splendid record of which the Negroes and their white friends may be justly proud.

It may also be appropriate in this connection to recall that throughout the period of hostilities the Negro was never suspected of espionage or of sympathy with the enemy, and that he has been wholly indifferent to those movements fostered by radical aliens that aim at the destruction of the American form of government. This good record of the whole race deserves such publicity as will offset the common tendency to judge it by the shortcomings of some of its members. No people is spurred to higher things when habitually referred to in disparaging or contemptuous terms. Ordinary human beings tend to live up to or down to the rôle assigned them by their neighbors.

On several previous occasions the University Commission for the Study of Race Problems has addressed appeals to the college men of the South for more justice and fair play for the twelve millions of our colored citizens. At this time we would appeal especially for a large measure of thoughtfulness and consideration, for the control of careless habits of speech which give needless offense, and for the practice of just relations. To seek by all practicable means to cultivate a more tolerant spirit, a more generous sympathy, and a wider degree of coöperation between the best elements of both races, to emphasize the best rather than the worst features of interracial relations, to secure greater publicity for those whose views are based on reason rather than prejudice—these, we believe, are essential parts of the Reconstruction programme by which it is hoped to bring into the world a new era of peace and democracy. Because college men are rightly expected to be moulders of opinion, the Commission earnestly appeals to them to contribute of their talents and energy in bringing this programme to its consummation.

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April 26, 1919.

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